

Social Identification in Europe during Times of Crisis

A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of Influence Factors



Inaugural-Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie
an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

vorgelegt von

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*„Einstmals war das Ich in der Herde versteckt:
und jetzt ist im Ich noch die Herde versteckt.“*

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Soziale Identifikation in Europa in Krisenzeiten: Eine theoretische und empirische Untersuchung von Einflussfaktoren

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Krisen sind nichts Neues für die Europäische Union (EU), und doch scheint der Begriff die täglichen Nachrichten seit einigen Jahren stärker zu dominieren. Auf die *Rechtsstaatlichkeitskrise* folgten die *Brexit-Krise* und die *Coronakrise*, alle begleitet von der sich stetig zuspitzenden *Klimakrise*. Diese Krisen eint, dass sie den Zusammenhalt sozialer Gruppen mittel- und unmittelbar gefährden.¹ Das ist besonders problematisch, da sie nur gemeinschaftlich bewältigt werden können.

Eine wichtige Grundlage für sozialen Zusammenhalt und das Fortbestehen sozialer Gruppen bildet die *soziale Identität* von Menschen: die Identifizierung mit einer gemeinsamen Gruppe (z.B. Haslam et al., 2017; Jetten et al., 2020). Die soziale Identität beschreibt den Teil des Selbstverständnisses, den Menschen aus ihrer Zugehörigkeit zu sozialen Gruppen (z.B. einem Land) ziehen, zusammen mit dem Wert und der emotionalen Bedeutsamkeit dieser Zugehörigkeit (Tajfel, 1978). Identifizieren sich Menschen mit einer Gruppe, orientieren sie ihr Denken, Fühlen und Handeln an den Gruppennormen, -werten und -überzeugungen, dem *Identitätsinhalt* (Haslam et al., 2020; McGarty et al., 1994; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Identifizieren sich Menschen also beispielsweise mit einer Gruppe, die Toleranz und Solidarität großschreibt, ist es wahrscheinlich, dass sich diese Werte in ihrem Handeln widerspiegeln.

Menschen haben in der Regel mehrere soziale Identitäten, die koexistieren. Übergeordnete Identitäten (z.B. die Europäische Identität) umfassen Sub-Identitäten (z.B. nationale Identitäten). Eine Person kann sich demnach als Europäer*in und als Deutsche*r sehen. Mit welcher Gruppe sie sich in einer konkreten Situation identifiziert, hängt von der

¹ Der russische Angriffskrieg auf die Ukraine im Jahr 2022 unterscheidet sich von den genannten Krisen, da es sich hierbei um einen Angriff auf Europa durch einen externen Aggressor (Außengruppe) handelt. Eine solche Konstellation stärkt dem Sozialen Identitätsansatz folgend die soziale Identifikation mit der Eigengruppe, insbesondere, wenn diese im Vergleich zur Fremdgruppe positiver bewertet wird (z.B. Turner et al., 1987). Dies spiegelt sich beispielweise in engen Kooperationen der EU-Mitgliedsstaaten und in schnellen politischen Entscheidungen auf EU-Ebene wider.

Salienz (kognitiven Aktivierung) der Gruppe ab. Diese kann von verschiedenen internen und externen Faktoren, beispielsweise von Führungspersonen oder Krisen beeinflusst werden.

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit Einflussfaktoren auf die soziale Identifikation von Menschen im soziopolitischen Kontext der EU während Krisenzeiten. In Anbetracht der Aktualität globaler Krisen spielen supranationale Zusammenschlüsse wie die EU eine besonders tragende Rolle. Einzelne Länder allein können etwa globalen Pandemien oder der Klimakrise kaum Einhalt bieten. Dabei nimmt die Arbeit zwei Perspektiven ein: Der erste, empirische Teil geht der Frage nach, wie sich der Beginn der Covid-19 Pandemie auf die soziale Identifikation von Menschen in Deutschland auf drei Inklusionsebenen (subnational, national, supranational) auswirkte. Konkret wird untersucht, wie sich der Krisenbeginn darauf auswirkte, wie stark sich Menschen mit ihrem Bundesland, Deutschland und Europa identifizieren. Zudem werden Zusammenhänge zwischen sozialer Identifikation und Solidarität mit Außengruppen in den Blick genommen. Im zweiten, konzeptionellen Teil wird eine Arbeit vorgestellt, die den Einfluss politischer Führungspersonen in den Fokus nimmt. In diesem Teil wird am Beispiel der EU ein identitätsbasiertes Bezugssystem von Führungsnarrativen entwickelt, das beleuchtet, wie Führungskräfte (übergeordnete) soziale Identitäten stärken können. In dieser Arbeit wird die europäische Identität als EU-Identität konzeptualisiert, da die EU heute als Hauptakteur im europäischen Identitätsdiskurs sowie als maßgebend über die Inhalte, die als „europäisch“ gelten, gesehen wird (Zimmermann, 2010).

Teil I: Soziale Identifikation während Covid-19

Eine Exploration der Veränderung von sozialer Identifikation und Fremdgruppeneinstellungen auf drei politischen Ebenen in den ersten Monaten der Covid-19 Pandemie

[Engl. Titel: Social Identification during COVID-19: An exploration of changes in social identification and relations with outgroup attitudes at three political levels during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic]

Der erste Teil wurde gemeinsam mit Dr. Martin Fladerer von der *TUM School of Management, Technische Universität München* und Prof. Dr. Dieter Frey (LMU München) entwickelt. Im Projekt war Melissa Hehnen primär für die Studienkonzeption, Datenerhebung und -auswertung verantwortlich. Das Manuskript wurde gemeinschaftlich ausgearbeitet und ist derzeit im Review-Prozess (Revision 1) beim *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* (Stand: September 2022).

Die Covid-19 Pandemie verdeutlicht, wie kollektive Krisen soziale Gruppen (z.B. die EU) herausfordern, da sie sozialen Zusammenhalt schwächt, aber nur auf Gruppenebene bewältigt werden kann (Haslam et al., 2021; Wilson, 2020). Die Identifikation mit einer gemeinsamen Gruppe (z.B. einer Nation) bildet in diesem Kontext eine wichtige Grundlage für gemeinschaftliches Handeln (z.B. Cárdenas et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2017; Jetten et al., 2020). Dies gilt auch mit Blick auf Außengruppenmitglieder (z.B. Menschen in anderen Ländern), die auf übergeordneter Ebene Teil einer gemeinsamen Gruppe sind (z.B. der EU; z.B. Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Haslam et al., 2020; Verhaegen, 2018).

Im Pandemiekontext nimmt eine Mehrzahl an Studien den Einfluss sozialer Identifikation auf das Handeln, Fühlen und Denken von Menschen in den Blick (z.B. Cárdenas et al., 2021; van Bavel et al., 2022; Vignoles et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Konkret können Arbeiten etwa zeigen, dass die Identifikation mit einer Gruppe die Solidarität

unter Gruppenmitgliedern stärkte (z.B. Cárdenas et al., 2021) und positive Auswirkungen auf das psychische Wohlbefinden hatte (z.B. Bowe et al., 2022). Nur wenige Arbeiten beleuchten umgekehrt, wie die Covid-19 Pandemie die soziale Identifikation von Menschen beeinflusst hat. Diese Arbeiten sind zudem vorwiegend theoretischer Natur (z.B. Ashforth, 2020; Godinic et al., 2020; Jetten et al., 2020), empirische Arbeiten gibt es kaum (als Ausnahme siehe Chan et al., 2021; Kachanoff et al., 2021). Weiterhin fehlen Studien, die die Vielschichtigkeit sozialer Identitäten berücksichtigen und die Auswirkungen der Pandemie auf übergeordnete soziale Gruppen in den Blick nehmen.

Mit der vorliegenden Studie möchten wir die Forschungslücke ein Stück weit schließen und verfolgen die folgenden drei Ziele:

1. Analyse der Entwicklung der europäischen (supranationalen), deutschen (nationalen) und Bundesland- (subnationalen) Identifikation in den ersten Monaten der Pandemie.
2. Untersuchung der Beziehungen zwischen diesen drei Identitätsebenen.
3. Analyse des Zusammenhangs zwischen sozialer Identifikation mit diesen drei Ebenen und moralischen Einstellungen gegenüber Außengruppen auf den entsprechenden Levels.

In Anlehnung an Kuhn und Nicoli (2020) definieren wir die subnationale, nationale und supranationale Ebene als „die drei wichtigsten“ (S. 6) territorialen Ebenen im soziopolitischen Kontext der EU. Da unsere Studie eine sehr volatile soziopolitische Entwicklung unmittelbar betrachtet, verfolgen wir einen explorativen Ansatz.

Die Daten dieser Feldstudie wurden via Onlinebefragungen zu drei Messpunkten mit je vierwöchigen Zeitabständen von April bis Juni 2020 erhoben (finale Stichprobe: $N = 296$); alle Studienvariablen wurden dabei zu jedem Messzeitpunkt erfasst. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Identifikation auf europäischer Ebene über alle Messzeitpunkte signifikant abnahm ($b = -0.19$, $p < .001$, 95% KI [-0.26, -0.12]); ebenso sank die Identifikation mit dem eigenen Bundesland über den Erhebungszeitraum bedeutsam ($b = -0.07$, $p = .032$, 95% KI [-0.13, -

0.01]). Die nationale Identifikation veränderte sich hingegen kaum ($b = -0.02$, $p = .537$, 95% KI [-0.08, 0.04]). Zwischen den Identitätsebenen bestanden zum ersten Messzeitpunkt positive Kovarianzen. Die Zusammenhänge der Identifikationsentwicklungen zwischen den drei Ebenen waren ebenfalls positiv, was bedeutet, dass Teilnehmende, deren soziale Identifikation auf einer Ebene stärker abnahm, auch eine stärkere Abnahme der sozialen Identifikation auf den anderen Ebenen angaben.

Eine höhere europäische Identifikation ging mit einer höheren moralischen Verpflichtung gegenüber dem Wohlbefinden und den Interessen von Nichteuropäer*innen einher ($b = 0.17$, $p = .003$, 95% KI [0.06, 0.28]), sowie mit einer größeren Bereitschaft, mit diesen im Pandemiekontext Ressourcen zu teilen ($b = 0.18$, $p = .001$, 95% KI [0.07, 0.29]). Letzterer Zusammenhang bestand auch auf subnationaler Ebene gegenüber Menschen aus anderen Bundesländern ($b = 0.12$, $p = .011$, 95% KI [0.03, 0.22]).

Die Studie gibt erste Hinweise auf Einflüsse der Covid-19 Pandemie auf die soziale Identifikation von Menschen und hebt dabei insbesondere die Fragilität übergeordneter Identitäten hervor. Forschung zeigt, dass vor allem Führungskräfte in ihrer Rolle als Identitätsmanager*innen diese Fragilität beeinflussen und Gruppenidentitäten stärken können (z.B. Fladerer, Haslam et al., 2021). Unsere Ergebnisse deuten ferner darauf hin, dass soziale Identifikation in Abhängigkeit von Kontextbedingungen eine Grundlage für gruppenübergreifende Solidarität bieten kann. Das bedeutet, dass sich Menschen, die sich mit einer Gruppe identifizieren, unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen auch solidarisch gegenüber Außengruppenmitgliedern zeigen. Neben situativen Kontextbedingungen der Pandemie spielt hier möglicherweise der Identitätsinhalt eine tragende Rolle (Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021; Haslam et al., 2020). Die EU strebt beispielsweise danach, ihre Bürger*innen auf Grundlage von als spezifisch europäisch definierten Werten wie Toleranz, Solidarität und Nichtdiskriminierung zu vereinen (Zimmermann, 2010). Dies kann zu den Zusammenhängen

zwischen sozialer Identifikation und Außengruppensolidarität auf supranationaler Ebene beigetragen haben. In Zeiten globaler Krisen ist dies eine dringend benötigte Ressource.

Teil II: EU-Einstellungen durch Identitätsführung gestalten

Untersuchung von pro-EU und EU-skeptischen Identitätsnarrativen

[Engl. Titel: Shaping EU Attitudes through Identity Leadership: Investigating pro-EU and EU-sceptic identity narratives]

Der zweite Teil wurde gemeinsam mit Dr. Martin Fladerer von der *TUM School of Management, Technische Universität München*, Dr. Frank Mols von der *School of Political Science & International Studies, The University of Queensland (Brisbane, Australia)* und Prof. Dr. Dieter Frey (LMU München) entwickelt. Im Projekt war Melissa Hehnen primär an der Themenausarbeitung und Konzeption beteiligt. Das Manuskript wurde gemeinschaftlich erarbeitet und ist derzeit im Publikationsprozess im *Journal of Political Psychology* (Stand: September 2022).

Die EU sieht sich seit einigen Jahren mit erstarkenden populistischen, EU-skeptischen Parteien und Politiker*innen konfrontiert, die negative EU-Narrative verbreiten und die Stabilität der Union gefährden (z.B. die AfD in Deutschland oder die PiS in Polen; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). Literatur zu EU-Einstellungen konzentriert sich damit einhergehend vor allem auf politische Narrative, die das Vertrauen in die EU untergraben (z.B. Csehi & Zgut, 2020; Mols, 2012; Mols & Jetten, 2020). Dabei handelt es sich meist um beschreibende Arbeiten – systematische Perspektiven, die einen kohärenten Analyserahmen spannen, fehlen.

Nicht zuletzt der erste Teil dieser Arbeit verdeutlicht, wie wichtig es ist, auch ein tieferes Verständnis davon zu erlangen, wie positive EU-Narrative gestaltet werden müssen, um das Vertrauen in die EU zu stärken. In diesem Sinne ist das Ziel dieses Forschungsprojektes, ein konzeptionelles, theoretisch fundiertes Bezugssystem für Führungsnarrative zu entwickeln und hierbei die proeuropäische Perspektive in den Blick zu

nehmen. Dabei können wir zeigen, dass, obgleich inhaltlich konträr, die zugrunde liegende Dynamik positiver und negativer EU-Identitätsnarrative sehr ähnlich ist.

Unser Bezugssystem stützt sich auf Literatur zu sozialer Identitätsführung (z.B. Haslam et al., 2020), Identitätsentwicklung (z.B. Batalha & Reynolds, 2012), Leader-Follower-Kommunikation (z.B. Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021) und wahrgenommener kollektiver Kontinuität (z.B. Sani et al., 2007). Wir definieren Narrative als Erzählungen über soziale Gruppen, die darauf zielen, ein spezifisches Verständnis des Kollektivs zu konstruieren (Brown, 2006). Unser Bezugssystem umfasst drei Kernbausteine: 1) eine (übergeordnete) Gruppenidentität gestalten, 2) die Gruppenidentität managen und 3) die Gruppenidentität aufrechterhalten. Darüber hinaus diskutieren wir aufkommende Mitsprache innerhalb der Gruppe als relevanten internen Faktor, der die Akzeptanz von Führungsnarrativen beeinflusst.

Der erste Baustein, *eine (übergeordnete) Gruppenidentität gestalten*, beschreibt die Reflexion von Führungskräften über die Gruppenidentität. Es ist wichtig, dass Identitätsgestalter*innen ein vertieftes Verständnis von Gruppen- und sozialen Identitätsprozessen sowie deren Bedeutsamkeit für Führung und politisches Handeln entwickeln, um die gemeinsame Identität repräsentieren und prägen zu können (Haslam et al., 2020; van Knippenberg, 2011). Konkret bedeutet dies, dass Führungskräfte verstehen, wie soziale Identitäten entstehen, was sie ausmacht und wann Menschen bereit sind, soziale Gruppen zu verlassen (etwa, wenn die Gruppe im Vergleich zu Außengruppen schlechter abschneidet; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Zudem beinhaltet dieser Baustein, dass Führungskräfte ein vertieftes Verständnis der Gruppenidentität entwickeln, die sie repräsentieren. Das bedeutet, dass sie die Entstehungsgeschichte der Gruppe, Pfeiler ihres Selbstverständnisses, bereits gemeisterte Herausforderungen und Zukunftsvisionen erfassen. Insbesondere mit Blick auf übergeordnete Gruppen spielt darüber hinaus ein Bewusstsein für die

Gruppenstruktur, die Beziehungen zwischen (Unter-)Gruppen und deren Auswirkungen auf die übergeordnete Identität eine wichtige Rolle (Haslam et al., 2017; Hogg et al., 2012).

Der zweite Baustein, *die Gruppenidentität managen*, umfasst vier Facetten: 1) das Schaffen einer kollektiven Kontinuität, also einer kohärenten Erzählung, die auf dem historischen Verständnis der Gruppe aufbaut und die Vergangenheit mit der Gegenwart und der Zukunft der Gruppe verbindet; das heißt, die Einbettung der Entwicklung der Gruppe in einen konsistenten Handlungsstrang (Sani et al., 2007); 2) das Respektieren der Untergruppen und der bestehenden Gruppenstruktur, was beinhaltet, dass auch abweichende Meinungen zu einem gewissen Maß toleriert werden, beispielsweise verschiedene Positionen von EU-Mitgliedsstaaten auf EU-Ebene (z.B. Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021), bei 3) gleichzeitiger Förderung der übergeordneten Identität (Eggins et al., 2002) und positiver Intergruppengefühle zwischen Untergruppen, beispielsweise, indem die Rolle der übergeordneten Gruppe für die Verwirklichung gemeinsamer Ziele hervorgehoben wird oder über Intergruppenvergleiche auf der übergeordneten Ebene (z.B. durch einen Vergleich der EU mit den USA; Turner et al., 1987); und schließlich 4) die Nutzung inklusiver Sprache („wir/uns“ anstelle von „ich/mich“), was vermittelt, dass sich die Führungskraft selbst mit der Gruppe identifiziert (Fladerer, Haslam, et al., 2021; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Der dritte Baustein, *die Gruppenidentität aufrechterhalten*, beinhaltet zwei Kernelemente: 1) das Einstehen für gemeinsame Ziele und damit das Erreichen eines hohen Gruppenstatus. Dies umfasst, dass der Status der Gruppe sichtbar gemacht und in den Alltag der Gruppenmitglieder eingebettet wird, sodass diese ein positives soziales Selbstwertgefühl entwickeln können, z.B. über die mediale Berichterstattung über Erfolge der EU (Ellemers et al., 1997) und 2) die Aktualisierung des Identitätsinhalts, um im ständigen Wettbewerb verschiedener Narrative mithalten zu können. Die Welt und auch die Gruppe selbst entwickeln sich stetig weiter und es ist wichtig, dass Führungskräfte sensitiv für diese

Dynamik bleiben. Dies setzt einen kontinuierlichen Prozess aus Zyklen des Reflektierens, Repräsentierens und Realisierens voraus (Haslam et al., 2017, 2020). Zudem nimmt dieser Baustein die Notwendigkeit in den Blick, auf interne und externe Kräfte zu reagieren, die die gemeinsame Identität der Gruppe gefährden (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019).

Die Entwicklung von Narrativen ist ein dynamischer, fortlaufender Prozess, der von einer Reihe an Faktoren beeinflusst werden kann (z.B. konkurrierende Narrative oder externe Bedrohungen; Haslam et al., 2020, 2021). Studien heben in diesem Zusammenhang die Rolle von *aufkommender Mitsprache innerhalb der Gruppe* hervor (z.B. Sani, 2008). Damit ist gemeint, dass Gruppenmitglieder abweichende Meinungen zum Ausdruck bringen können, ohne Angst vor Unterdrückung oder Ausgrenzung haben zu müssen (z.B. Eggins et al., 2002). Sowohl zu wenige (Dogma) als auch zu viele (Kakophonie) Stimmen untergraben die Bemühungen von Führungskräften, eine Kernerzählung zu entwickeln (Werte und Überzeugungen, die von den meisten Gruppenmitgliedern geteilt werden; Benford & Snow, 2000). Dies stellt insbesondere für demokratische Systeme wie die EU eine Herausforderung dar, die die Meinungsvielfalt als charakteristisches Element dessen, „wer wir sind“ definieren: Zu große Abweichungen von der Kernerzählung können nationalistische und separatistische Tendenzen nach sich ziehen. Gleichzeitig können Untergruppen entscheiden, die übergeordnete Gruppe zu verlassen, wenn sie sich nicht repräsentiert fühlen (Sani, 2005, 2008). Eine Balance kann erreicht werden, indem eine Gruppe ihre Werte und Normen selbst definiert (Hornsey et al., 2006).

Die Aktualität globaler Krisen macht transnationale Organisationen umso bedeutsamer (z.B. Frey & Hehnen, 2021). Derzeit scheint es jedoch, als hätten EU-skeptische Parteien eine einflussreiche Rolle im öffentlichen europäischen Diskurs (z.B. Portice & Reicher, 2018). Unsere Arbeit legt systematisch dar, wie Identitätsführung diesen Tendenzen entgegenwirken und die europäische Identität stärken kann (z.B. Haslam et al., 2020; Mols & Jetten, 2020).

Ausblick

Die vorliegende Arbeit hebt in der Betrachtung von Einflussfaktoren auf soziale Identitäten in Krisenzeiten im Kern die folgenden Aspekte hervor: Der erste, empirische Teil stellt die Fragilität von Gruppenidentitäten heraus und betont gleichzeitig deren Bedeutsamkeit bei der Bewältigung globaler Krisen. Der zweite, konzeptionelle Teil fokussiert sich auf die aktive Beeinflussbarkeit sozialer Identitäten und beschreibt, wie Führungskräfte (übergeordnete) Gruppenidentitäten stärken können.

Die Ergebnisse sollten im Kontext ihrer Limitation interpretiert werden. Teil I stützt sich auf Daten aus nur einem EU-Staat und ist hinsichtlich einiger soziodemographischer Merkmale nicht repräsentativ für die deutsche Bevölkerung. Dies schränkt die Generalisierbarkeit der Ergebnisse ein (z.B. Mols et al., 2009), was jedoch durch den Fokus auf Veränderungen innerhalb von Personen abgeschwächt wird. Zudem fokussiert sich die Arbeit auf soziopolitische Identitäten und klammert andere Gruppen aus, die zu Beginn der Pandemie eine wichtige Rolle spielten (z.B. die Familie; Vignoles et al., 2021). Unter Beachtung dieser Limitationen leistet die vorliegende Arbeit unserer Ansicht nach einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Verständnis der Fragilität von Gruppenidentitäten im Krisenkontext und bietet erste Evidenz für deren Bedeutsamkeit bei der globalen Krisenbewältigung. Darauf aufbauend ergeben sich folgende Fragen für zukünftige Forschung:

Unsere Ergebnisse zeigen, dass soziale Identitäten unter bestimmten Bedingungen Außengruppensolidarität fördern können. Damit stehen sie im Widerspruch zu der empirisch fundierten These, Menschen würden dazu neigen, ihre eigene(n) Gruppe(n) zu bevorzugen, um ihr soziales Selbstwertgefühl zu stärken (z.B. Abrams et al., 2021; Spears & Otten, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Es braucht zukünftiger Forschung, um fundierte Annahmen darüber treffen zu können, welcher Voraussetzungen es bedarf, damit soziale Identitäten Solidarität auch über die Gruppengrenzen hinaus fördern.

Unsere Studie zeigt weiter auf, wie sich Krisen auf die soziale Identifikation von Menschen auswirken können und welche Rolle verschiedene Gruppenebenen hierbei spielen. Um ein umfassenderes Bild zu schaffen, bedarf es weiterer Arbeiten, die unterschiedliche Krisenkontexte sowie weitere (auch nicht territoriale) Gruppen einbeziehen und die Kriseneinflüsse mit Blick auf zugrundeliegende Mechanismen analysieren.

Im zweiten, konzeptionellen Teil wird ein literaturgestütztes Bezugssystem entwickelt, das in seiner Gesamtheit weiterer empirischer Fundierung bedarf. Neben der relativen Gewichtung der einzelnen Bausteine sollten auch die Faktoren, die den Prozess der Entwicklung identitätsbasierter Narrative beeinflussen, empirisch weiter untersucht werden. Zudem bedarf eine mögliche Generalisierbarkeit auf nicht-politische Kontexte und andere Führungssituationen empirischer Fundierung. Unter Berücksichtigung dieser Limitationen bietet der zweite Teil dieser Arbeit einen systematischen Orientierungsrahmen, der aufzeigt, welche Faktoren zu einem erfolgreichen Identitätsmanagement beitragen und wie Führungskräfte Gruppenidentitäten, insbesondere auf übergeordneter Ebene, stärken (und schwächen) können. Aufbauend auf diesem Analyserahmen ergeben sich folgende weiterführende Forschungsfragen:

Unser Bezugssystem eignet sich auch zur Analyse identitätsbasierter negativer EU-Narrative. Es fehlt allerdings eine genauere Untersuchung, die analysiert, wie es populistische und nationalistische Parteien und Politiker*innen schaffen, an Zustimmung zu gewinnen. Möglicherweise profitierten sie davon, in (ständiger) Opposition zu sein und Themen kreativer interpretieren zu können als Regierungsparteien (Mudde, 2007), oder es bedarf einer geschlossenen oppositionellen Front, die vielerorts fehlt. Ein differenziertes Verständnis könnte helfen, die Wirkung von Führungsinterventionen wie die Nutzung identitätsbasierter Narrative zu katalysieren.

Schließlich gibt unser Analyserahmen einen systematischen Überblick über wichtige Erfolgsfaktoren von Identitätsführung und stützt sich dabei auf bestehende Literatur. Es scheint wahrscheinlich, dass noch weitere Aspekte die Wirkung identitätsbasierter Führungsnarrative beeinflussen. Zukünftige Forschung könnte den bestehenden Orientierungsrahmen um weitere Bausteine erweitern.

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Part I

Social Identification during COVID-19

**An exploration of changes in social identification and relations with
outgroup attitudes at three political levels during the first months of the
Covid-19 pandemic**

Part I

Social Identification during COVID-19

An exploration of changes in social identification and relations with outgroup attitudes at three political levels during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic

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1. Abstract

Social identification with an (superordinate) ingroup is an important foundation of solidarity which would be significant for the successful (global) management of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it is important to understand how the pandemic affects peoples' identification with social groups. In this study, we analyzed the development of social identification at three levels of inclusion in the socio-political context of the EU (sub-national, national, and supranational) at the beginning of the pandemic and the influence of social identification on outgroup solidarity in a German sample. Data were collected via online surveys at three measurement points with four-week time lags from April to June 2020 (final sample: $N = 296$). We fitted (generalized) linear mixed models to analyze three research questions. First, the results show that supranational and sub-national identification decreased over time while national identification did not change significantly. Second, there were positive relations between all levels of identification and identification development. Third, social identification was associated with outgroup support at supranational and sub-national level. The results provide initial evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has shaped social identification at different levels. These findings highlight the fragility of social identities and the important role they play in the context of global crises.

Keywords: Social Identity Approach; Nested Social Identities; Covid-19 Pandemic

2. Introduction

[A virus a thousand times smaller than a grain of sand] showed us just how fragile our community of values really is – and how quickly it can be called into question around the world and even here in our Union. (Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, 16 September 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic has kept the world in suspense for two years now, showing how quickly human communities can become vulnerable in times of crises. This is a challenge for social groups – such as countries or the EU – and their political leaders, since the pandemic can only be overcome collectively (Haslam et al., 2021; Wilson, 2020). Within a country, social distancing by individuals alone cannot flatten the curve of incidences and on transnational level, one country can vaccinate their population no matter how fast – as long as there are vaccination backlogs in other countries new virus variants can arise. Research shows that identification with a common ingroup (e.g., the country) is an important foundation of community and shared support (e.g., Cárdenas et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2017; Jetten et al., 2020). This also applies to members of groups that are considered ‘outgroups’ at one level (e.g., foreigners) but are part of a shared ingroup at a superordinate level (e.g., the EU; e.g., Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Haslam et al., 2020; Verhaegen, 2018). However, there are still open questions about the effects of (global) crises on individual’s social identification, especially from the perspective of multiple identities: Do people tend to focus on closer groups, or look across national borders? And how do social identities develop on different levels?

In this paper, we want to fill this research gap by studying how people in Germany identified themselves with groups on three levels of inclusion in the socio-political context of the EU at the beginning of the pandemic. In line with Kuhn and Nicoli (2020) we define the sub-national, national, and supranational level as “the three most salient” (p. 6) and analyze

the development of people's federal state (sub-national), German (national) and European (supranational) identification at three time points between April and June 2020. Since our research live-monitored a socio-political development in a highly complex and volatile situation, our analysis takes an exploratory-descriptive approach.

2.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic in Germany and Europe: A timeline from April to June 2020

The first Covid-19 infection in the EU was reported on 24th January 2020. Three days later, the virus reached Germany and by early March all German federal states were officially affected (Dallmus, 2021; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020a). The peak of the first wave of transmission was reached by early May in most European countries (in Germany by early April). While there were triage situations in countries like Italy, in Germany the capacity of free intensive care beds was never overloaded during this wave (Aerzteblatt, 2020a). Nevertheless, it resulted in an increase in intensive care unit patients and deaths (Zeit, 2020).

How did Germany and the EU react to the pandemic? The German government pursued a national strategy whereby some federal states went beyond. At the beginning of February, first travelers were quarantined. Schools and daycare centers closed in mid-March and other contact restrictions followed soon (e.g., event bans, contact and travel restrictions, and the closing of shops, and restaurants). At the end of April, the German government introduced mandatory facemasks for local public transport and shops (Aerzteblatt, 2020b; Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2020; Bundesregierung, 2020; Maaz & Diedrich, 2020; Tagesschau, 2020a). First easing led to the gradual return of public life from the beginning of May (Tagesschau, 2020b).

In addition, the EU took numerous measures itself, including the allocation of funds, the provision of medical equipment for member states (e.g., breathing apparatus), cross-border treatments of patients and the dispatch of medical teams (e.g., on April 7, the EU sent

doctors and nurses to Italy; Auswärtiges Amt, 2020; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020b; European Commission, 2021).

2.2 The Perception of German and European Actions

Despite these transnational efforts, unilateral actions of nations like the closing of inner-European borders received a lot of media attention and were interpreted as “failure” of the European idea (e.g., BBC News, 2020; Ladurner, 2020; Leithäuser & Gutschker, 2020). This perception is reflected in several representative surveys conducted by the European Union. Results show for example that public faith in EU institutions declined due to their handling of the Covid-19 pandemic with the greatest effect in Germany: 55% of all participants considered the political system of the EU to be “inadequate” (Dennison & Puglierin, 2021). Data from Eurobarometer surveys show that only 34% were satisfied with the solidarity between EU member states in fighting the pandemic (Germany 41%) at the end of April / beginning of May (the number rose slightly in June; European Parliament, 2020a, 2020b). However, other analyses indicate that there was only a limited willingness for European solidarity at the beginning of the pandemic (Bauhr & Charron, 2021; Koos & Leuffen, 2020).

On the contrary, on national level, results of the Politbarometer survey indicate that most respondents (69%) considered the Covid-19 measures in Germany to be sufficient in early March (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2020a). Follow-up surveys came to similar results at the end of March, April, and May (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2020b; ZDF Presse, 2020a, 2020b). At the same time, the approval of the relaxation of the measures was relatively low (ZDF Presse, 2020b, 2020c). This picture was also evident in other European countries. Overall, the analyses indicate that despite extensive European measures the crisis decreased faith in the EU and challenged European solidarity while satisfaction with national measures was quite high (see also Ahrendt et al., 2020).

2.3 Social Identification in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Solidarity and ingroup support (e.g., comply with the health measures) are strongly shaped by a sense of a shared social identity (Hunt & Benford, 2004). Social identities are “that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). When a social identity is psychologically activated (i.e., salient), the person orients him- or herself to the norms, values, and beliefs – the *identity content* of the situationally relevant identity (Haslam et al., 2020; McGarty et al., 1994; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Social identities are also characterized by their *structure* (Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021; Haslam et al., 2020). Usually, people have more than one social identity that coexist and can be nested (Bentley et al., 2020) whereby superordinate identities (e.g., the European identity) involve sub-identities (e.g., national identity). Literature shows that different levels of identification influence each other respectively and that the perception of nested group structures by ingroup members is highly context-dependent (e.g., Cinnirella, 1997; Jans et al., 2015; Mols & Haslam, 2008).

There are several studies that analyze how social identities influence people's behavior and are shaped by internal and external factors (e.g., crises; e.g., Abrams et al., 2021; Breakwell et al., 2022; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Jetten et al., 2021). One research strand focusses on the psychological construct of social identity threat, that is internal or external forces menacing the cohesion or status of the group (e.g., Ellemers et al., 2002; Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019; Kachanoff et al., 2021; Renström et al., 2021; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). The Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as such an identity threat since it opens up competition between different groups for limited resources and the best way to deal with the crisis. Furthermore, the specific case of a global pandemic forces people to separate each other – on all levels – and thus reduces interactions which may weaken a “shared sense of us” (e.g., Jans et al., 2015).

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, studies show that social identification was associated with behavioral changes and bolstered solidarity among ingroup members (Cárdenas et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Drury et al., 2021; Farias & Pilati, 2021; Federico et al., 2020; Jetten et al., 2020) as well as members' wellbeing and mental health (Bonetto et al., 2021; Bowe et al., 2022; Frenzel et al., 2022; Graupensperger et al., 2020; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2022). For example, van Bavel and colleagues (2022) could show that higher levels of national identity were associated with greater engagement in public health behaviors and the support of public health policies among 49,968 participants from 67 countries. Vignoles et al. (2021) found that identification at different levels led to different outcomes: In their study, family identification was positively associated with disease preventive behaviors (personal hygiene, physical distancing), while national and humanity identification were positively related to prosocial behaviors (helping proximal and distal others). In line, Wang et al. (2021) found that persons who identified strongly on global level reported greater prosociality (which was defined as helping others and doing something good for society) in the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study, global identification was a stronger predictor than national identification.

However, despite those positive effects of social identification, literature shows that stereotypes and devaluations of outgroup members were further consequences during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jetten et al., 2020; Roberto et al., 2020). For example, Zagefka and Sun (2021) found, that ingroup help was offered more willingly than help for outgroup members, especially when people strongly identified with their nation.

There is only little research addressing the reverse connection of how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected social identification. Most of these papers discuss theoretically plausible effects (e.g., Ashforth, 2020; Godinic et al., 2020; Jetten et al., 2020) but few are empirical studies (for an exception, see Chan et al., 2021). Kachanoff et al. (2021), for example, analyzed the impact of symbolic and realistic threat on national identity. In their

study, symbolic (but not realistic) threat was positively related to self-reported engagement in (isolation) behaviors to affirm the national identity.

2.4 The Present Study

Only few empirical studies focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people's social identification and none of these studies considered the multilevel nature of social identities or analyzed the impact of the pandemic on superordinate social groups.

Furthermore, existing literature leaves open the question to what extent social identities can help in dealing with global crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. On the one hand, social identification appears to promote positive behavioral outcomes in relation to respective ingroup members, but on the other hand it seems to fuel devaluation of outgroups. In this exploratory, longitudinal study we want to fill the research gap by following three goals:

1. Analyzing the development of each, the European (supranational), German (national) and federal state (sub-national) identification during the first months of the pandemic.
2. Examining how these identity levels relate to one another.
3. Analyzing the relations between social identification on all three levels and moral attitudes towards outgroups on corresponding levels.

3. Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

The survey started on April 9th, 2020 and was closed by June 22nd, 2020. Participants were recruited via social media, the website of a magazine for psychology and an email distribution list for students at a large German university. After their participation in the first wave, participants were invited to the second and third wave via email after a four-week time lag, respectively. This study was conceptualized as longitudinal research (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010) examining the change in our focal variables which were measured at all

three time points. As this study was part of a larger research project, further measures were included in the study. Only measures relevant to this paper are reported in this manuscript in more detail. A full list of measures is available from the first author. Demographic information was only assessed at t1. The survey was conducted in German.

The sample was composed of 296 German-speaking participants, living in Germany. Overall, the sample included citizens from 10 (of 16) federal states in Germany. The sample mean age was 30.94 years ($SD = 14.20$), range 14-80 years. Participants were primarily female (61.1%). At time 2 (t2, after a four-week time lag), 142 completed the questionnaire. Thirty-two only clicked on the first page of this follow up and 23 dropped out and had to be excluded. At time 3 (t3, after another four-week time lag), 98 participants completed the survey. In this follow-up, 20 participants ended the survey at the first page and 16 dropped out. All participants who took part in the first wave were invited to both follow-ups, thus some participants only completed the questionnaire at time 1 and 3 ($N = 82$). Overall, the study data included 536 observations from 296 individuals, which were used for further analyses.

We tested for differences between the samples of t1, t2 and t3. No differences were found between the groups based on gender, nation, federal state, or educational background. There was only a significant difference for age, $F(1,392) = 9.25, p < 0.01$. Pairwise comparisons with t -tests and pooled SD indicated a significant difference between the samples of t1 and t3. The participants at t3 had a significantly higher average age.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Social Identification with the federal state, Germany, and Europe

To measure social identification, participants responded to four items for each level that were adapted from Doosje and colleagues (1995) on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1 = ‘not at all’ to 6 = ‘very strong’: ‘I identify with other people in my federal

state/Germans/Europeans.’, ‘I see myself as a citizen of my federal state/German/European.’, ‘I am glad to be a citizen of my federal state/German/European.’, ‘I feel strong ties with people in my federal state/Germans/Europeans.’.

3.2.2 Moral consideration for outgroup members

To measure moral consideration for outgroups, we used a translated version of two items developed by Reed and Aquino (2003). Participants were asked about the extent to which they believed to have a moral or ethical obligation to show concern for the welfare and interests of people outside (1) the EU, (2) Germany or (3) their federal state (moral obligation), respectively and about the extent to which they believed to be obliged to make resources available to the named groups of people, provided there was a suitable opportunity for them (resources sharing). Both items were measured on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1 = ‘*absolutely no obligation*’ to 6 = ‘*very strong obligation*’.

3.3 Analytical Strategy

To explore our research questions, we estimated (Generalized) Linear Mixed Models ((G)LMM). One advantage of LMMs over conservative methods (such as repeated measures analysis of variance) is that they are able to work with missing data without degrading the dataset by performing listwise deletion (Muth et al., 2016). This is relevant because longitudinal studies are vulnerable to participant drop-outs (Wolke et al., 2009). Another important advantage is that next to fixed effects, interindividual variance can be modelled in form of random effects (Magezi, 2015; Muth et al., 2016). In general, (G)LMMs consist of a within-subjects model (Level 1) and a between-subjects model (Level 2; Laird & Ware, 1982). We included the random effect of participant on intercept in all models. For interpretability, we centered the points of measurement so that the intercept equaled social identification at the first time of measurement (Intercept – 1).

We fitted LMMs in *R* (R Core Team, 2017) using the package *lme4*, version 1.1-27.1 (Bates et al., 2015; see Bates, 2008a, 2008b, for technical background). To fit *p*-values for fixed effects, we used *R* package *lmerTest*, version 3.1-3 (Kuznetsova et al., 2017).

To investigate the first research question, we ran separate models for identification on each level with *time* as fixed effect to analyze the development of sub-national, national, and supranational identification over time (Models 1-3). To allow a more differentiated analysis, we further compared social identification at t2 and t3 (as factors) to the baseline measure at t1.

To investigate the second research question, we analyzed the relations between the three identity levels using Bayesian methods. The Bayesian approach presents attractive alternatives to classical inference statistics (Wagenmakers et al., 2018) and is gaining in popularity in psychology research (van de Schoot et al., 2017). An important benefit of Bayesian estimation is that it “extends naturally to complicated models” (Wagenmakers et al., 2018, p. 42) and thus, “is ideally suited for models that respect the complexity inherent in psychological data” (Wagenmakers et al., 2018, p. 43).

We fitted a multivariate generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) using *R* package *MCMCglmm*, version 2.33 (Hadfield, 2010). This package can be used to fit GLMMs with Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) techniques (Hadfield, 2010). Since our posterior distributions violate the assumption of multivariate normal distribution and we had only few data information compared to the number of model parameters, we opted for a descriptive analysis.

We ran a GLMM for European, national, and sub-national identification, including the covariances between fixed effects and between random effects (Model 4). We excluded covariances between intercepts and slopes (fixed and random) and used default values as prior specifications. We increased the total number of iterations to 200,000, the number of initial MCMC iterations that should be discarded to 10,000 and the thinning interval to 100.

To investigate the third research question, we analyzed how social identification at the three levels influenced moral consideration for outgroup members. Therefore, we fitted LMMs for moral obligation towards people from another federal state (sub-national level), another country (national level) and outside the EU (supranational level) with social identification at the corresponding level as fixed effect (Models 5-7). In addition, we modelled the influence of social identification on the willing to share resources with corresponding outgroup members at all levels (Models 8-10).

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

To detect influential outliers, we calculated Cook's distance for social identification at all three levels as outcome variables and time as predictor variable as well as for both measures of moral consideration for outgroup members at all three levels as outcome variables and the corresponding social identification as predictor. No influential outliers were found and had to be excluded.

We checked the normality assumption of the residuals graphically. Visually, the distribution was slightly distorted for some models. However, studies show that non-normally distributed residuals do not substantially affect the estimation of fixed effect coefficients (Maas & Hox, 2004; Schielzeth et al., 2020). Thus, no additional measures (such as transformations which would also have critical theoretical implications; Lo & Andrews, 2015) were taken.

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations of the study variables as well as scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for social identification at all three levels. The reliability was excellent for all scales and showed high consistency across time.

Table 1*Descriptive statistics of study variables*

Measure	Time 1			Time 2			Time 3		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
	<i>N</i> = 296			<i>N</i> = 142			<i>N</i> = 98		
Social Identification									
European Level	4.72	1.08	.89	4.48	1.07	.88	4.29	1.04	.89
National Level	4.38	1.13	.87	4.44	1.01	.87	4.33	1.10	.89
Sub-national Level	4.29	1.26	.90	4.34	1.13	.89	4.05	1.11	.90
Moral Consideration for Outgroups									
Moral Obligation for Outgroups									
European Level	4.05	1.39	-	3.92	1.36	-	3.89	1.36	-
National Level	4.43	1.14	-	4.29	1.13	-	4.21	1.16	-
Sub-national Level	4.59	1.20	-	4.41	1.19	-	4.43	1.25	-
Resources Sharing with Outgroups									
European Level	4.09	1.43	-	4.06	1.38	-	3.97	1.36	-
National Level	4.56	1.15	-	4.37	1.16	-	4.25	1.20	-
Sub-national Level	4.76	1.20	-	4.60	1.18	-	4.43	1.41	-

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha.

4.2 Analysis of the Research Questions

4.2.1 Research Question 1: Development of social identification over time

Table 2 summarizes LMMs for social identification at all three levels each with *time* as fixed effect and the random effect of participant (i.e., Models 1 – 3). The average starting level of European identification was at 4.71 of national identification at 4.38, and of sub-national identification at 4.30. In all cases, there was considerable variance between subjects. Overall, there was a significant effect of time on European identity ($b = -0.19, p < .001, 95\%$ CI [-0.26, -0.12]) and sub-national identity ($b = -0.07, p = .032, 95\%$ CI [-0.13, -0.01]). At national level, time had no meaningful impact ($b = -0.02, p = .537, 95\%$ CI [-0.08, 0.04]). To check whether the Bayesian approach led to similar results as frequentist statistics, we compared the fixed effects of the univariate models fitted with the package *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015) to the posterior fixed effects, calculated with the multivariate Bayesian model. Fixed estimates were practically the same.

Looking at the development of social identification more differentiated, Table 3 shows that European identity declined significantly over all measurement points while there was only a significant drop in sub-national identity from t1 to t3 ($b = -0.15, p < .05, CI [-0.28, -0.02]$) but not from t1 to t2.

Table 2

LMMS for social identification on all three levels with time as continuous fixed effect

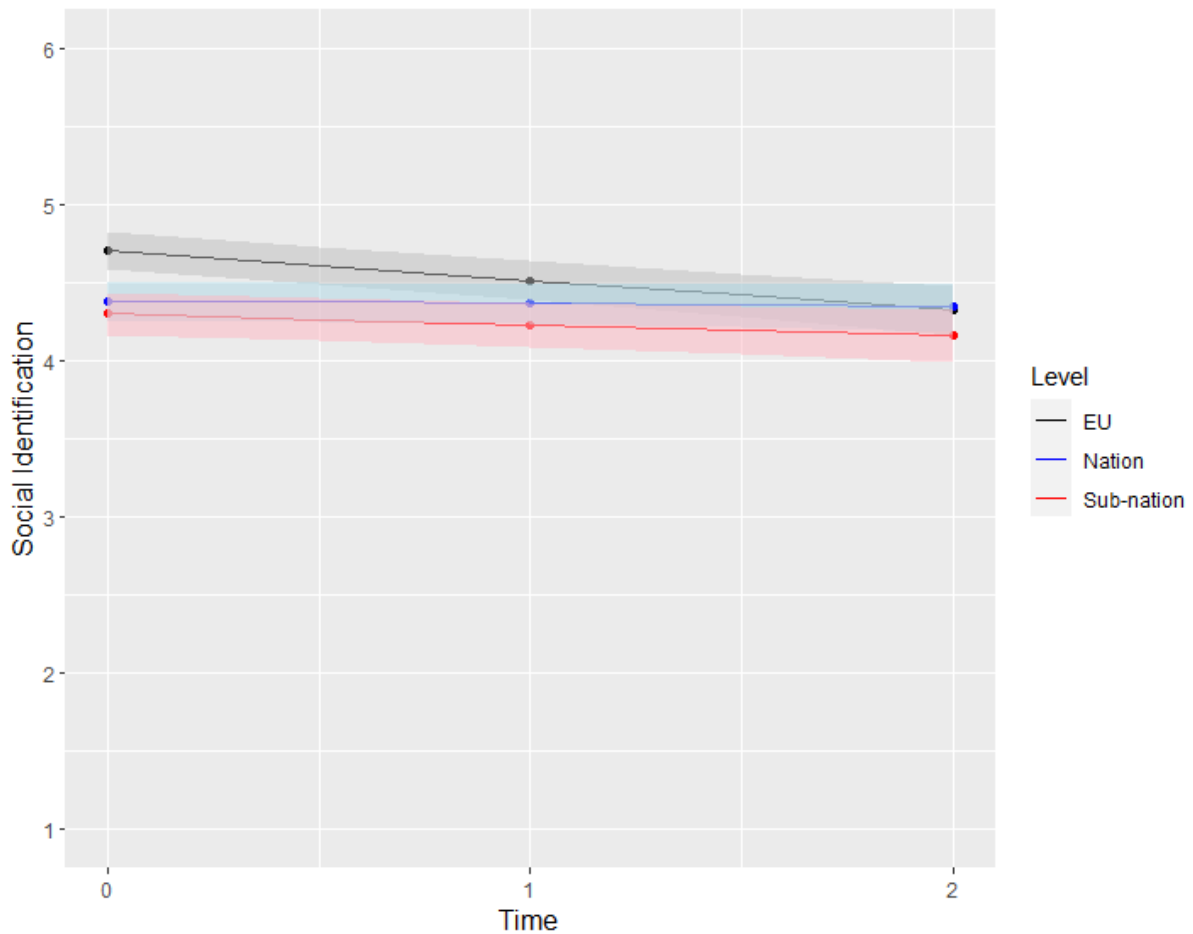
Fixed Effects						
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper		
Model 1: European Identification						
Intercept	4.71	0.06	4.59	4.83	76.57	< .001
Time (linear)	-0.19	0.04	-0.26	-0.12	-5.45	< .001
Model 2: National Identification						
Intercept	4.38	0.06	4.26	4.51	68.57	< .001
Time (linear)	-0.02	0.03	-0.08	0.04	-0.62	.537
Model 3: Sub-national Identification						
Intercept	4.30	0.07	4.16	4.44	60.90	< .001
Time (linear)	-0.07	0.03	-0.13	-0.01	-2.16	.032
Random Effects						
			Variance	<i>SD</i>		
Model 1: European Identification						
Participant (Intercept)			0.84	0.92		
Residual			0.30	0.55		
Model 2: National Identification						
Participant (Intercept)			0.98	0.99		
Residual			0.25	0.50		
Model 3: Sub-national Identification						
Participant (Intercept)			1.25	1.12		
Residual			0.24	0.49		

Note. p-values for fixed effects have been calculated using Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom method. Confidence Intervals have been calculated using the Wald method.

Table 3*LMMS for social identification on all three levels with time as factored fixed effect*

	Fixed Effects					
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper		
Model 1: European Identification						
Intercept	4.71	0.06	4.59	4.83	76.57	< .001
T2 (as factor)	-0.26	0.06	-0.38	-0.14	-4.23	< .001
T3 (as factor)	-0.36	0.07	-0.50	-0.22	-4.97	< .001
Model 2: National Identification						
Intercept	4.38	0.06	4.26	4.51	68.57	< .001
T2 (as factor)	-0.01	0.06	-0.12	0.10	-0.18	.856
T3 (as factor)	-0.04	0.07	-0.17	0.09	-0.65	.518
Model 3: Sub-national Identification						
Intercept	4.30	0.07	4.16	4.44	60.90	< .001
T2 (as factor)	-0.04	0.06	-0.15	0.07	-0.73	.466
T3 (as factor)	-0.15	0.07	-0.28	-0.02	-2.24	.026

Note. p-values for fixed effects have been calculated using Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom method. Confidence Intervals have been calculated using the Wald method. T1 as reference category.

Figure 1*Development of social identification on three levels over time*

Note. Development of social identification on three socio-political levels in Germany ($N = 296$) between April and June 2020.

4.2.2 Research Question 2: Relations between different levels of social identification

Table 4 summarizes posterior covariances between the random intercepts of social identification at all three levels, Table 5 shows correlations between the fixed intercepts (Model 4). The results show that there were positive covariances between random intercepts at different socio-political levels at within-subjects level. This indicates that participants with above-average social identification compared to the grand mean at one level also had above-average social identification at the other levels at t1. In concrete terms, this means that a person who strongly identified with Europe also strongly identified with Germany and their federal state. The strongest relation was between national and sub-national identification ($\sigma^2 = .68$).

These results are similar at between-subjects level: Overall, correlations between social identification at different levels were positive with the highest correlation between national and sub-national level ($r = .53$) at t1. This means that, overall, participants who identified more strongly with one level at t1 also showed higher identification at the other levels.

Table 4

Posterior covariance matrix for random intercepts of all identity levels (within-subjects level, Model 4)

Measure	1	2
1. European Identification		
2. National Identification	.42	
3. Sub-national Identification	.34	.68

Table 5

Posterior correlation matrix for fixed intercepts of all identity levels (between-subjects level, Model 4)

Measure	1	2
1. European Identification		
2. National Identification	.38	
3. Sub-national Identification	.30	.53

Table 6 summarizes posterior covariances between the random slopes, Table 7 shows posterior correlations between the fixed slopes (Model 4). At within-subjects level, relations between the development of social identification at different levels were small positive. Even if the covariations are close to zero, we considered them since covariations were specified as zero in the prior distribution of the GLMM. Thus, even small deviations from zero can be meaningful (van de Schoot et al., 2021). The results indicate in other words that people whose decrease of identification was above-average compared to the overall development also had an above-average decrease of identification at the other levels. Those results are reflected at between-subjects level indicating that overall, participants with a higher decrease of social identification at one level also had a higher decrease of social identification at the other levels with the highest correlation between the national and the sub-national level.

Table 6

Posterior covariance matrix for random slopes of all identity levels (within-subjects level, Model 4)

Measure	1	2
1. European Identification		
2. National Identification	.03	
3. Sub-national Identification	.02	.03

Table 7

Posterior correlation matrix for fixed slopes of all identity levels (between-subjects level, Model 4)

Measure	1	2
1. European Identification		
2. National Identification	.11	
3. Sub-national Identification	.11	.16

4.2.3 Research Question 3: Relations between social identification and moral consideration for outgroups

Models 5-10 provide information for the analysis of our third research question: Table 8 gives an overview of LMMs for moral obligation to show concern for outgroup members at all three levels (sub-national, national, supranational) with social identification at the corresponding level as fixed effect and the random effect of participant (Models 5-7). There was a significant positive fixed effect of social identification at European level ($b = 0.17, p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.06, 0.28]$) and sub-national level ($b = 0.12, p = .011, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.22]$). At national level, the fixed effect was close to zero ($b = 0.01, p = .776, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.08, 0.11]$). The results indicate that people with stronger European identification had higher moral obligation to show concern for the welfare and interests of people outside Europe. At sub-national level, there was a weaker but statistically significant effect on feelings of moral obligation towards people from another federal state. National identification had no effect on moral obligation towards non-Germans.

Table 8*LMMS for moral obligation for outgroup members on all three identification levels*

Fixed Effects							
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	
			Lower	Upper			
Model 5: Europe Moral Model							
Intercept	3.24	0.27	2.72	3.76	12.21	< .001	
European Identification	0.17	0.06	0.06	0.28	3.04	.003	
Model 6: National Moral Model							
Intercept	4.32	0.22	3.89	4.75	19.62	< .001	
National Identification	0.01	0.05	-0.08	0.11	0.29	.776	
Model 7: Sub-national Moral Model							
Intercept	4.03	0.21	3.62	4.45	18.92	< .001	
Sub-national Identification	0.12	0.05	0.03	0.22	2.56	.011	
Random Effects							
				Variance	<i>SD</i>		
Model 5: Europe Moral Model							
Participant (Intercept)				1.29	1.13		
Residual				0.56	0.75		
Model 6: National Moral Model							
Participant (Intercept)				0.88	0.94		
Residual				0.43	0.65		
Model 7: Sub-national Moral Model							
Participant (Intercept)				0.87	0.93		
Residual				0.56	0.75		

Note. p-values for fixed effects have been calculated using Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom method. Confidence Intervals have been calculated using the Wald method.

Table 9 shows LMMs for resources sharing with outgroups at all three levels (sub-national, national, supranational) with social identification at the corresponding level as fixed effect and the random effect of participant (Models 8-10). There was only a fixed effect at European level ($b = 0.18$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.29]). While the fixed effect at national level was close zero, there was a weak (but not significant) effect at sub-national level ($b =$

0.08, $p = 0.094$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.18]). These results indicate that people with stronger European identification were significantly more willing to share resources with people outside Europe. At national and sub-national level, social identification had no meaningful impact.

Table 9

LMMS for resources sharing with outgroups on all three identification levels

Fixed Effects						
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			Lower	Upper		
Model 8: Europe Resources Model						
Intercept	3.23	0.27	2.70	3.76	11.87	< .001
European Identification	0.18	0.06	0.07	0.29	3.23	0.001
Model 9: National Resources Model						
Intercept	4.37	0.23	3.93	4.82	19.27	< .001
National Identification	0.03	0.05	-0.07	0.13	0.57	.566
Model 10: Sub-national Resources Model						
Intercept	4.36	0.22	3.93	4.79	19.87	< .001
Sub-national Identification	0.08	0.05	-0.01	0.18	1.68	.0943
Random Effects						
			Variance	<i>SD</i>		
Model 8: Europe Resources Model						
Participant (Intercept)			1.34	1.16		
Residual			0.59	0.77		
Model 9: National Resources Model						
Participant (Intercept)			0.90	0.95		
Residual			0.47	0.68		
Model 10: Sub-national Resources Model						
Participant (Intercept)			0.95	0.98		
Residual			0.57	0.75		

Note. p-values for fixed effects have been calculated using Satterthwaite's degrees of freedom method. Confidence Intervals have been calculated using the Wald method.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was an identity threat (Kachanoff et al., 2021), affected social identification on multiple socio-political levels. The results of this research provide evidence that social identification changed in the context of the crisis. More specifically, our data indicate that supranational (i.e., European) and sub-national (i.e., federal state) identification decreased significantly over the course of two months between April and June 2020 in a German sample. This finding goes along with literature postulating that the crisis has changed individuals' sense of "who we are" and may be perceived as identity threat (Ashforth, 2020, p. 1763; Chen et al., 2022). One explanation is that economic uncertainty resulting from crises (e.g., a pandemic) triggers identity disturbance – that is, the perception of discrepancies between an identity and the changed context, which can cause people to reconsider the groups they identify with (Ashforth, 2020; Godinic et al., 2020).

It is interesting that, in our study, European identification changed the most compared to closer social identities. One explanation could be a dissatisfaction with European COVID-19 policies. In line, Abrams et al. (2021) argue that after a first peak in superordinate identification due to the perception of being "all in the same boat", identification with superordinate groups decreased as the crisis unfolded due to the experience that the initial response underperformed. The pandemic may also have caused people to focus on more proximal social groups (e.g., friends, family; e.g. Frenzel et al., 2022; Vignoles et al., 2021). This could have been bolstered by the fact that (trans)national mobility was severely restricted up until mid-June in Germany. Furthermore, results show that social identification at different levels correlated positive with each other. This result indicates that, in our sample, participants perceived the different identity levels as complementary nested in each other, which is in line with the European integration perspective that people's regional and national

identities can be seen as parts of a European identity (Treaty on European Union of 1992; see also Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020). Our findings are furthermore consistent with work by Cinnirella (1997) who found positive correlations between European identity and measures of Italian identity among Italian respondents. However, correlations were negative in a British sample, indicating that there are national differences (Cinnirella, 1997). Furthermore, in our study, the relation between sub-national and national identification was stronger than the relations between both subgroup identities and European identity.

Our findings further indicate that there were positive relations between the developments in social identification at different levels in our data. Participants who identified less with one group over time also identified less with the other groups. However, literature shows that people have a basic need to feel connected and to structure the social world (e.g., Ashforth, 2020). One interpretation of our findings may be that (non-)political groups became more relevant towards the end of the survey. In line, Vignoles et al. (2021) could show that from mid-April to mid-May U.K. citizens identified most strongly with their family compared to the local community, nation, and humanity. However, further research is needed to empirically place these findings on a firmer ground.

Finally, the present study finds that social identification seems to strengthen outgroup solidarity at specific levels. At European level, this effect was the strongest, suggesting that higher social identification was associated with higher moral obligation to show concern for the welfare and interests of people outside the EU and the willingness to share resources with them. Moral consideration was also shown at sub-national level towards people from another federal state, albeit to a lesser extent. These results are contradictory to the empirically based claim that people tend to favor their ingroup in order to enhance their social self-esteem (Spears & Otten, 2012; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; White et al., 2021). Furthermore, in the context of the pandemic, Jetten et al. (2020) argue that “threat consolidates group

boundaries and so increases exclusion between groups” (p. 143; see also Renström et al., 2021). In line, Abrams et al. (2021) claim that people who experienced uncertainty during the pandemic enhanced their quest for positive intergroup outcomes.

Our results show a different pattern, albeit to a lesser extent, at supranational and sub-national level. One possible explanation is that differentiation, not demarcation, is the key to social self-esteem. For example, a group could differentiate itself from others by being “the most tolerant” (Jetten et al., 1996). In line with this, Brewer (1999) reviews that much ingroup bias and intergroup discrimination is motivated by preferential treatment of ingroup members rather than hostility toward outgroups. Concerning the supranational level, this may also be explained by the idea that the identity content plays a crucial role when it comes to attitudes and behavior towards outgroups (Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021; Haslam et al., 2020). The identity content defines the group members’ views about “who we are,” “what we want to be,” and “how we move forward” (Haslam et al., 2020; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). The EU aims to unite EU citizens based on a shared “European” set of civic values. Values like tolerance, solidarity and equality are important foundations of positive outgroup relations. Furthermore, the EU aims to play a mediating and cooperative role on the world stage, as exemplified by the European COVID-19 measures that were globally oriented and not limited only to EU member states. Another reason could be that people with strong supranational identification are more globally oriented and thus the global dimension of the pandemic and the need for global action is more salient for them (Vignoles et al., 2021).

At sub-national level, different explanations seem plausible. Containing the pandemic in Germany was a primary national task and accompanied by external border closings. Thus, the nation became salient in the management of the pandemic. In addition, people may have experienced the situation in other federal states as relevant for themselves. The closure of external borders may also have contributed to our result that national identification was not

associated with moral consideration towards foreigners. This measure made Covid infections in other countries less relevant for people in Germany at this time.

Our study suggests some practical implications in the context of crisis management. The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was accompanied by a dynamic in social identification particularly at supranational level. From a practical viewpoint, this result points out the importance of being considerate of the impact that crises have on social identification (Haslam et al., 2021; Wilson, 2020). Research shows that leaders play an important role in promoting and strengthening (superordinate) social identities (e.g., Fladerer, Haslam et al., 2021; Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Haslam et al., 2020; Kershaw et al., 2021). Hence, it seems important that group leaders deal with what they (can) do to strengthen group members' social identifications (Haslam et al., 2021; Wilson, 2020). Our findings further shed light on the importance of promoting tolerance and solidarity as key pillars of identity content to facilitate relations between social identification and outgroup support. Here again identity leaders are in demand who, in their role as identity entrepreneurs, can shape the perception of "who we are" (Fladerer, Haslam et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2020).

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

Our findings should be interpreted in the context of its limitations of which three are discussed here. First, our research was conducted in Germany. Previous work indicates that nested group structures can be perceived differently in various countries or social groups. Moreover, identification with these groups can differ (e.g., Cinnirella, 1997; Mols et al., 2009). In our sample, identification with all three socio-political groups was moderate to high. Thus, it would be interesting to replicate our research in different European countries or comparable supranational institutions. Secondly, we recruited a diverse sample of participants via different channels and participation was not incentivized. That is, we chose a random sampling strategy instead of utilizing platforms like Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) or

Prolific, which are better suited for experimental research (Zack et al., 2019). However, we cannot assume that our sample was representative for the German population. We were interested in within-person changes, which may make this less relevant, yet developmental trajectories may differ based on third variables (e.g., socio-economic status). There are opportunities for future research to investigate moderating variables of within-person changes. Thirdly, the focus of this research lay on three levels of socio-political identities (see Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020). However, other social groups may have been of or gained importance during the crisis (e.g., Cárdenas et al., 2021; Frenzel et al., 2022). Therefore, it would be interesting to include other (non-)political social groups (e.g., family or political party) in future research.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory research live-monitoring the development of social identification and its consequences provides initial evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected social identification at multiple socio-political levels. Our results further indicate how social identification depending on its self-understanding in terms of norms and values can be a basis for - not only ingroup solidarity but also - outgroup support, which is a critically needed resource in this global crisis.

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Part II

Shaping EU Attitudes through Identity Leadership

Investigating pro-EU and EU-sceptic identity narratives

Part II

Shaping EU Attitudes through Identity Leadership

Investigating pro-EU and EU-sceptic identity narratives

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1. Abstract

The European Union (EU) faces many challenges. Chief among them are a) the growing electoral appeal of EU-sceptic parties, b) the prevalence of negative narratives about the EU, and c) frequent marginalization of government leaders openly advocating EU membership. It is hence unsurprising that the EU attitude literature focuses heavily on ways in which leaders undermine (rather than bolster) confidence in the EU. The aim of this conceptual paper is to fill this void, and to shine a spotlight on how leaders seek to restore confidence in the EU. Rather than to merely describe what pro-EU leaders say in public, we propose a conceptual model that combines older EU attitude research (into ‘nested’ social identities and perceived identity compatibility), with more recent social psychology research (into ‘identity mobilization’ and ‘identity leadership’). By combining insights from both fields, our framework enables us to gain a deeper understanding of why certain pro-EU narratives can be expected to ‘take hold’ and instill faith in the EU among the public at large. The discussion focuses on the implications for EU leadership.

Keywords: Social Identity Approach; European Union (EU); Nested Social Identities; Identity Management; Identity Leadership

2. Introduction

The Polish EU-sceptic governing ‘Law and Justice’ Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) declares on its website:

We reject political correctness, that is, the restrictions that are becoming more and more painful for many Europeans and are now imposed not only by cultural aggression, but also by administrative measures and criminal repression. Our own sovereign nation-state is a key value for us because without it, other values that we consider fundamental cannot be realized. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, 2014).

Statements like the above can be described as political-strategic narratives with which a party or political leader seeks to construct a specific image of the EU to mobilizing their supporters and attract new ones. Parties that spread such EU-sceptic, nationalist narratives have been winning support in European countries (e.g., AfD in Germany, PVV in the Netherlands) and even within EU institutions (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). The EU-sceptic narratives disseminated by these parties range from seemingly sound criticism (e.g., criticizing the EU’s handling of the Eurozone crisis) to outright ‘wild conspiracies’ (e.g., believing that the true leaders of the EU are staying out of the public eye). Although some criticisms are clearly at odds with what is widely regarded as fact, such rhetoric may nevertheless undermine citizens’ identification with the EU and trust in EU institutions. Indeed, in many EU-member states, a divide has opened between vocal populist radical right parties (PRRP) openly advocating total withdrawal from the EU and equally vocal mainstream politicians advocating for a complete overhaul of the European project (e.g., Börzel & Risse, 2020). As a result, the EU is confronted with growing schismatic tensions (Henley, 2018), culminating in one member-state (the UK) deciding to leave the EU.

Hence, it is unsurprising that the EU attitude literature features many analyses (e.g., Csehi & Zgut, 2020; Mols, 2012; Mols & Jetten, 2020) that examine the ways in which EU-

sceptic leaders and parties seek to *undermine* confidence in the EU, and comparatively few analyses that examine the way in which pro-EU parties and leaders seek to *bolster* it. What is more, research into party and leader influence (on both sides of the argument) is not only limited, but also tends to be overly descriptive and lacking a coherent theoretically informed framework that enables one to draw out lessons that can be applied elsewhere. To our knowledge, there is a lack of systematic, theoretically informed research into competing narratives about the EU, and hence we only have a superficial understanding of why certain narratives ‘resonate’ while others do not. A deeper understanding of political narratives about EU membership is important, as the struggle over defining ‘who we are’ plays an increasingly important role in European politics and is strongly linked to the transformative process of European integration (Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020).

The aim of this paper is to address these shortcomings. Integrating literature on social identity leadership (e.g., Haslam et al., 2020) and identity development (e.g., Batalha & Reynolds, 2012), leader-follower communication (e.g., Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021), perceived collective continuity (e.g., Sani et al., 2007) and intergroup leadership (e.g., Hogg et al., 2012), we offer a *social psychological* perspective² that complements “[t]he current debate over ‘the future of Europe[,]’ [which] is to a large extent about how Europe should be governed” (Olsen, 2002, p. 922; see also Castano, 2004).

At first glance, pro-EU and anti-EU leaders may seem to adopt radically different rhetorical strategies to mobilize voters. This is accurate in that the two sides promote very different ideas about the EU’s final destination. However, by unpacking EU identity leader discourses in a systematic way, it will become apparent that the *underlying dynamic* for constructing positive and negative EU identity-related narratives (i.e., stories about the social group that actors author to construct a specific understanding of the collective; Brown, 2006)

² Adjacent work from the field of sociology can be found in the literature on ‘social movements’ (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000) – particularly by ‘New Social Movement’ theorists (e.g., Benford, Gramson) who integrated social psychological perspectives on collective identities and mobilization in their theorizing.

is remarkably similar in both cases, in that it involves 1) crafting a (superordinate) group identity, 2) managing the group identity, and 3) sustaining it. We decided to focus on the less-studied side of this coin, namely leaders advancing pro-EU messaging, to illustrate that the same identity management processes are at work on both sides.

Our identity-based framework of leader narratives is designed to clarify about what leaders (can) do to strengthen (or weaken) group members' social group (dis-)identifications. Whereas prior EU attitude formation analyses serve as a useful reminder that 'nested identities' can be perceived as either compatible or incompatible by social groups, the more recent identity leadership literature shows that leaders play an active role in framing identities (e.g., as (in)compatible, as under threat). Indeed, as social identity theorists have long recognized, leaders play an important *identity management* role, and it is this task that is typically essential for ensuring a group's survival and thriving (Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Haslam et al., 2020; Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020). This social psychological literature provides us with useful insights that can be redeployed in EU attitude research. More specifically, what this literature teaches us is a) that leaders will gain influence over followers' attitudes once followers come to perceive them as prototypical for their group, and b) that influential leaders persuade followers to endorse their proposal by presenting it as epitomizing 'what we, as a group, stand for as a group' (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

2.1 The EU as Case Study

The identity-based framework of leader narratives we propose can in principle be used to study leaders' identity construction efforts in all kinds of social settings (e.g., sports teams, business organizations, nations; Haslam et al., 2020), and to mobilize people for (or against) all kinds of social issues (e.g., crisis response; Haslam et al., 2021; Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020). In US politics, for example, research highlights the roles of former President of the US Barack Obama as *identity entrepreneur* and his wife, former first lady Michelle Obama, as

identity mediator who actively crafted a group identity that aimed to unify an increasingly socially divided America (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012; Gleibs et al., 2018).

However, we chose the EU as the site to illustrate our model because it is a clear example of a real-world domain in which we find nested (territorial) identities that leaders can frame as (in)compatible. Moreover, identity constructions have been found to be “most influential for those without strong prior attitudes and toward distant, abstract, or new political objects” (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 13), such as the EU.

The EU is typically described as a hybrid multi-level governance system, with supranational and intergovernmental decision-making features at the EU level, stakeholders at different (sub-national, national, EU) levels of the governance system, and, more importantly here, with a citizenry which possesses varying degrees of a sense of belonging to the (sub)national and supranational entities, and different senses of compatibility between them. As Cinnirella (1997) showed in his research comparing Italian and UK students, Italian students were more likely to view national and EU ‘belonging’ in a compatibilist positive-sum way, while UK students were more likely to see them in an incompatibilist zero-sum way.

Such insights are valuable, and show us seemingly ‘spontaneous’ expressions of (dis)identification with the EU. However, what such analyses do not show is the extent and ways in which these attitudes are influenced by ‘thought leaders.’ It is important to recognize that EU attitudes are composite, in that they reflect a mixture of spontaneous citizen sentiments and induced sentiments cultivated by influential leaders (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Mols & Jetten, 2020). Indeed, as research has shown, voter attitudes are the product of an interaction between the “supply side” and the “demand side” factors, with leaders simultaneously reading and shaping public sentiment (Mols & Jetten, 2020). This research helps us appreciate that politicians often play an important role in determining *whether* nested identities become perceived as (in)compatible, and this, in turn, depends on how politicians construct the meaning and content of the categories in question. As social identity researchers

explain, once internalized, this identity content will define group members' views about "who we are," "what we want to be," and "how we move forward" (i.e., group goals, norms, rules; Haslam et al., 2020; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

In the case of the EU, citizens of EU member-states are *automatically* granted EU citizenship, and, as legal scholars have pointed out, EU citizenship is conditional upon citizenship of one or more EU member-states. Hence all EU citizens have dual (national-EU) citizenship. To rephrase this into self-categorization language, EU citizens all belong to a particular EU-member-state first (subordinate group), and they are expected to also feel a sense of belonging to the EU (superordinate group). The structure of the EU currently unites 27 countries, but its borders are not set in stone. A country can apply for EU membership when it adheres to the political, cultural, and economic rules of the EU. However, countries can also leave – as has recently happened. According to official EU documents, the EU defines its identity as a secondary social identity. Thus, the EU's official stance is that it does not seek to replace national identities but to complement them (Treaty on European Union of 1992). Indeed, by speaking of 'the peoples of Europe' (Treaty of Rome of 1957) and by adopting the motto 'unity in diversity' in the 1990s, the EU has tried to encourage Europeans to identify, for example, as both Belgian *and* European.

Furthermore, in terms of norms and values, the EU has promoted a civic (rather than ethnic) understanding of EU citizenship and political community ('polity'). In other words, the EU has sought to unite citizens in member states based on a shared "European" set of civic values, thereby leaving space for national uniqueness. These objectives are articulated in Article 3 of the 1992 Treaty on European Union³. As some authors point out, these values are

³ Historically, the "Declaration on European Identity" published by the Council of the European Community in 1973 first outlines those "fundamental elements of the European Identity": (1) the shared *European values* (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, see Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union of 1992) and (2) the *protection of national diversity*.

deeply entrenched in the EU and play a key role in shaping the EU's approach to questions of social identification (Quenzel, 2005).

Before introducing our framework, it would be useful to provide a brief synopsis of landmark analyses in EU attitude research, beginning with research into growing Euroscepticism.

2.2 Understanding Euroscepticism

Whereas the 1970s and 1980s can be seen as an era marked by passive 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970) and widespread support for *the idea* of European integration, the 1990s and 2000s can be viewed as the era of rapidly rising EU-scepticism. As Mols & Jetten (2020) explain in their work on the growing popularity of populist EU-sceptic parties (e.g., the Dutch PVV, the Danish DP), this rise in EU-scepticism is best regarded as a combination of spontaneous and cultivated dissatisfaction with the EU. It is hence impossible to attribute changes in EU attitudes exclusively to changes in objective socio-economic conditions (see also Börzel & Risse, 2020; Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020). Nonetheless, this remains common in EU attitude research (e.g., Vasilopoulou, 2016).

From this conventional perspective, there is a presumed direct link between deprivation factors (e.g., rising unemployment or economic inequality) and anti-European attitudes (see also Serricchio et al., 2013). However, this perspective cannot explain why regions that benefitted significantly from EU funding (e.g., Cornwall and Wales) nonetheless voted to leave the EU in the UK Brexit Referendum (Morris, 2016). This assumption was first questioned by Hooghe and Marks (2007), who postulated that "neither identity nor economic interest speak for themselves but are cued and framed by political actors." To understand variation in opinions on Europe, "one must endeavor to explain how Europe is constructed in political debate" (p. 42; see also Mols & Jetten, 2020). Thus, we base our analysis on the assumption that economic conditions alone cannot explain growing Euroscepticism, and that

political narratives play a significant role fomenting pro- and anti EU attitudes (De Vries & van Kersbergen, 2007; Reese & Lauenstein, 2014).

Looking at the political discourse, competing (leader) narratives exist about what the EU is, what role it should play in the future, and why citizens should either embrace or reject it. While dispute is to a certain degree an essential feature of a living democracy, in excessive forms it hinders efficient cooperation and threatens the maintenance of social groups (Sani, 2005, 2008). Because of the current paucity of positive EU identity leadership, populist Eurosceptics have considerable leeway to shape perceptions of the EU in a negative way (Krouwel & Abts, 2007). Parties promoting EU-scepticism typically go to great lengths to foment identity-related, nationalistic narratives that fuel people's fears or identity threats, and their popularity is at least in part attributable to such tactics (Mols, 2012). One could also see these narratives as attempts to destabilize the leadership of pro-EU political leaders by portraying them as *defiling* (i.e., incompatible with the values of the collective identity), *devaluing* (i.e., thwarting the pursuit of collective goals), *dividing* (i.e., disrupting the shared identity), and *destroying* (i.e., failing to create structures and activities that matter to the group) the national identity (Maskor et al., 2021). Meanwhile, pro-EU political leaders have struggled to develop positive counter-narratives that offer voters a more optimistic outlook on the EU.

In sum, EU attitude research assumes that a) politicians play an important role in framing EU membership (and identification; Börzel & Risse, 2020; Hooghe & Marks, 2009); b) superordinate social categories are complex, contested social structures (Maskor et al., 2021; Portice & Reicher, 2018; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001); and c) politicians have considerable control over whether (or not) followers come to view this overarching social category as compatible and desirable. This is why superordinate identities need to be actively

managed by *identity stewards*⁴ (e.g., EU representatives) to secure and win the support of their citizens (Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020; Mols & Jetten, 2020; Portice & Reicher, 2018).

2.3 Identity Leadership and EU Attitude Formation

As researchers focusing on the supply-side of identity formation have pointed out, “[n]arratives are [...] speech-acts [by thought leaders] that ‘bring into existence a social reality that did not exist before their utterance’” (Ford & Ford, 1995, p. 544 as cited in Brown, 2006, p. 734). There are typically competing narratives about social issues in society, and there is often considerable disagreement within a social group about which narrative should prevail (Brown, 2006). There is arguably greater scope for competing narratives in multilevel-governance systems (e.g., the EU), where citizens can identify with one or more territorial identities (Börzel & Risse, 2020; Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020). As researchers have shown, in such multilevel settings, different kinds of dynamics will shape identification. For example, EU attitude researchers have argued that ‘ingroup projection’ moderates support for the EU, with citizens being more likely to support the EU if they feel their local or national identity is reflected in the EU’s superordinate identity (Risse, 2004). As Wenzel and colleagues (2008) explain in their work on ingroup projection more generally, in nested social identities, people seek to project their subgroup identity onto the superordinate group – partly to increase their own significance.

Furthermore, research shows that EU identification is moderated by perceptions of the relationship between one’s country’s national government and ‘Brussels.’ More specifically, this research found that citizens in peripheral regions who feel dissatisfied with their region’s domestic position (i.e., viewing their region as marginalized) will be inclined to reject their national government’s EU stance (Mols & Haslam, 2008).

⁴ We define identity stewards in line with Bednar and colleagues (2020) as “formally sanctioned individuals who act on behalf of the [collective] to create and promote a positive view of its identity” (p. 205). In the case of the EU, these are primarily the (elected) political representatives but can also be other members of the formal structure of EU organizations.

Likewise, another study showed that leaders can exert influence over followers' identification with the EU by rendering other social categories salient and by framing them as (in)compatible with a 'European' identity. Indeed, such research not only confirms that social identities can be best regarded as "continuous processes of narration" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994, p. 198, as cited in Brown, 2006), but also that leaders can exert considerable influence over whether followers come to view EU membership as desirable or undesirable (Mols, 2012).

However, not all narratives are equally effective. For example, when identity stewards do not represent the shared interests of the group, the potency of their narratives will be limited (Haslam et al., 2020) and their position contested (Maskor et al., 2021; Portice & Reicher, 2018). For example, shortly after she was elected in 2019, European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen commented on "the European way of life", and the pro-EU views she expressed triggered a heated debate (Stevis-Gridneff, 2019).

There are many actors at different political levels who produce different narratives of the EU to advance their goals. PRRPs often utilize "alarmist" narratives in which they present social events and problems as existential threats to 'us.' Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) outline four main frames of EU-threatening crisis-narratives: economic factors, immigration, democracy/sovereignty, and national factors. Csehi and Zgut (2020) focus in this context on Hungary and Poland and show that PRRPs equate the EU with 'the corrupt elite,' whose actions harm 'the pure people' (Hungarians and Poles) and undermine national popular sovereignty. As Mols (2012, p. 339) explains, "[b]y persuading the electorate of an imminent threat to the collective 'us,' radical opposition leaders are able to gain considerable control not only over whether an 'issue' becomes regarded as a problem requiring a policy-solution, but also over whose evidence/knowledge counts." Such narratives not only postulate an alleged threat to the collective "us", but also construct and shape the ingroup and its self-

understanding (Hooghe, 2007). This bold strategy helps PRRPs to receive disproportionate media attention, which further increases their visibility (Mols & Jetten, 2020).

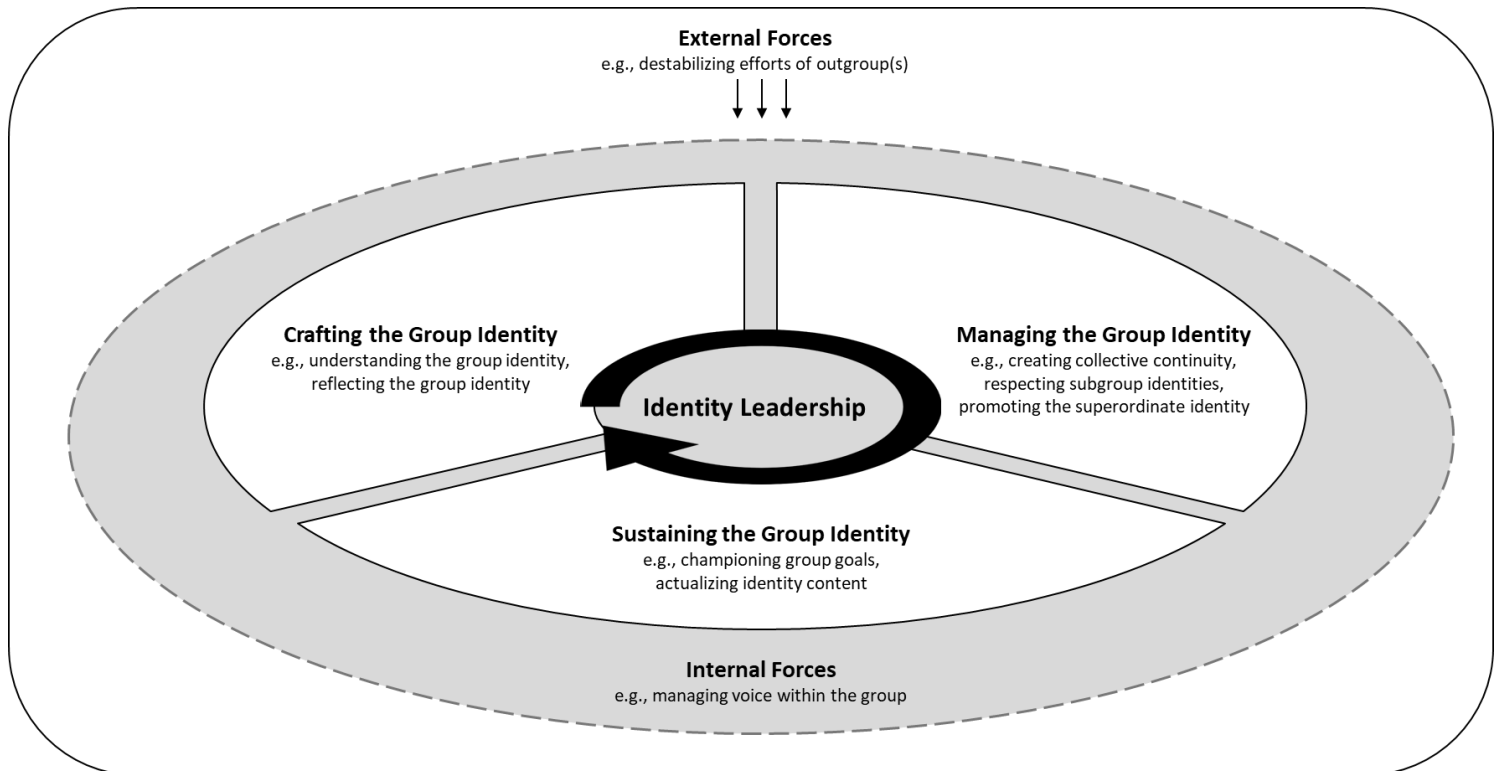
The EU's multilevel governance system offers leaders considerable scope to engage in creative identity entrepreneurship (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Leaders can not only invoke particular territorial social identities (e.g., European, Catalan, Italian), but also include other real and imagined social identities (e.g., 'baby-boomers', 'the 1%', 'ordinary hard-working families'). Looking at populist narratives, there are two main factors that seem to underlie their particularly high visibility: a direct, unmediated communication with the population they are reaching (e.g., via social media) and the fomenting of latent fears and prejudices, thereby framing and categorizing society in 'us – them' terms (Mols, 2012; Mols & Jetten 2020). By invoking certain social categories, and triggering 'us-them' comparisons, leaders gain traction over a) which social identities become salient, b) how they are being invoked and compared, and c) whether or not followers come to view the EU as compatible with their existing (subgroup) identities (e.g., Mols et al., 2009). In the end, the narrative that will have the greatest impact on voter attitudes is the one that is most effective in crafting and harnessing shared sense of 'us', and in framing the issue at hand (e.g., being for / against EU integration) as either an existential threat to the group's identity (EU-sceptic) or as epitomizing what the group stands for (Pro-EU).

3. An Identity-Based Framework of Leader Narratives

It should be clear from the above that there is a growing body of research documenting the ways in which leaders frame social identities, and how, in practice, this framing can be used to either bolster or undermine confidence in the EU. However, research so far has been rather skewed, and it has passed over the fact that while pro- and anti-EU leaders may be at opposite sides qua political project, their persuasion techniques are similar. In the remainder

of this paper we advance a theoretically informed framework for the analysis of both pro- and anti-EU narratives, but with a focus on pro-EU messaging.

In doing so, the framework combines descriptive elements – illustrated by representative quotes from EU political leaders – and research-based suggestions on developing effective identity-based narratives. The framework not only focuses on the content and language of effective narratives (*managing the group identity*) but uncovers elements and political strategies contributing to the successful construction of narratives (*crafting a [superordinate] group identity*) and sustaining their effectiveness over time (*sustaining the group identity*). However, this should not imply a rigid time sequence of the elements of the identity management process, as they are recursive in character. While there is reason to suggest that all elements of the framework are necessary for effective leadership narratives and function in an additive manner, the weighting and relevance of individual elements may vary due to internal and external factors (e.g., intragroup turmoil; Maskor et al., 2021). We will discuss *voice within the group* as a relevant internal factor influencing the acceptance of leader narratives.

Figure 1*Identity-based Framework of Leader Narratives***3.1 Crafting a (Superordinate) Group Identity**

Europe has seen a historical miracle. 70 years of peace between yesterday's hereditary enemies. (Emmanuel Macron)

Certainly, it would be beneficial for identity stewards to have an in-depth understanding of the importance of group and social identity processes for leadership and political behavior (e.g., in multinational negotiations; Batalha & Reynolds, 2012; crisis response; Haslam et al., 2021) as this will help them to mobilize potential supporters. To be sure, we do not assume that all leaders have this knowledge in explicit theoretical form. However, Haslam and colleagues (2020) argue that “it is impossible to lead a group unless one first understands the nature of the group that is to be led” (p. 203). For some leaders, the process of reflecting and understanding the group in terms of its goals, norms and values may

involve a conscious effort of study and research, while for others it may involve a more intuitive, implicit form of understanding the group.

Understanding the group identity, though, is the foundation of engaging in activities in accordance with the members' common values, interest and goals (Haslam et al., 2017; 2021). It is important that identity stewards in superordinate groups reflect their own group identities, relevant subgroup identities, and their interplay (Hogg et al., 2012; Wenzel et al., 2008). Reflecting social groups and their characteristics can take three perspectives: the past, the present, and the future. Social groups have a beginning and a history (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Sani et al., 2007). In their founding story, a group's core values, beliefs, and mentalities are inscribed, that is, the "true" essence of "who we are" which is the basis on which people came together. It is also the reference point to which people can return as the group moves through time (Sani et al., 2007). These founding stories are often tied to exceptional historical group members who embody what the group stands for. In the case of the EU, it is Robert Schuman's vision of a more peaceful united Europe, articulated in the 1950 Schuman Declaration, which became regarded the birthplace of a new vision for Europe and a new shared social identity as 'European' rather than as French or German:

Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. it will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. the coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany.

It is also important to learn about the defining failure and success stories of the group (Haslam et al., 2020). In this respect, Hofmann & Mérand (2020) argue that the construction of collective memory frames (i.e., the creation of a community of fate) was and continues to be an important driver of Europeanized cooperation. With a future-facing perspective, identity stewards may identify areas where discrepancies between "who we are" and "who we want to

be” exist. Identity stewards must be aware of the group’s understanding of “who we are” to be able to *represent* and serve the shared identity, which will allow them to influence the group members (Haslam et al., 2020; van Knippenberg, 2011). Another important part of reflecting the social group is understanding the relations between (sub)groups (e.g., nations; Hogg et al., 2012). This allows insights into “subjective representations of the key identity-based relations that are likely to impinge upon, and structure, their [superordinate group] behavior” (Haslam et al., 2017, p. 7).

3.2 Managing the Group Identity

3.2.1 *Creating Collective Continuity*

Today we must find the courage to start a new chapter together. [...] We owe it to all of those who have worked over the past seventy years to build this exceptional Europe.
(Emmanuel Macron)

Social identities are perceived as enduring entities that move through time (Sani et al., 2007). Thus, the past is connected to the group’s present and its future. In this regard, the perception of historical and cultural continuity is positively associated with a person’s need satisfaction (e.g., belonging, uncertainty-reduction) and several social identity measures (e.g., social identification, group entitativity; Sani et al., 2007). Thus, to develop effective narratives, those interested in the continuation of the group must be aware of the group’s history and also the plurality of voices within the group – this is particularly true for superordinate groups with multiple subgroups (Eggins et al., 2002; Hogg et al., 2012). If there was only one story, there would hardly be any disagreement and therefore no threat of group schism (Sani, 2008).

Building on this historical understanding, an identity leader may seek to develop a coherent narrative that spans the past and the present and connects these with the future of the group (Sani et al., 2007). Venus and colleagues (2019) uncovered the importance of collective

continuity in the communication of vision statements. Visions of continuity – that is, visions that “frame change as a different expression of the [shared] identity that preserves identity-defining aspects” (Venus et al., 2019, p. 682) – convey the perception of collective continuity that lead to a higher degree of support for future change. Above and beyond the focus on the representativeness of our “true self” (e.g., by utilizing historic accounts or national symbols), Reicher (2004) elaborates that to induce engaged followership (i.e., active support and identification), visions also need to be presented as “vital” for the survival of the group.

3.2.2 Respecting Subgroup Identities

To love Europe, is to love its nations. To love your country is to love Europe.

Patriotism is a virtue. Unchecked nationalism is riddled with both poison and deceit.

(Jean-Claude Juncker)

In addition to highlighting group continuity, it is important that identity stewards pay respect to the group structure (e.g., Fladerer, Steffens & Haslam, 2021). Research by Hornsey and Hogg (2000) demonstrates that persons are reluctant to forsake a valued group identity (e.g., national identity) in favor of a superordinate identity (e.g., EU) if their subgroup is not acknowledged. More specifically, in an experimental condition where only a superordinate identity was salient (i.e., as university member) participants showed stronger identification with their subgroup (i.e., faculty) and more intergroup bias towards other subgroups. However, when the superordinate group and subgroup were made salient simultaneously (or solely the subgroup identity), participants reported more favorable attitudes towards other subgroups. Thus, a potential relief for this challenge is to promote the superordinate identity while acknowledging (relevant) subordinate identities (Eggins et al., 2002).

One should also not forget that a representative of a superordinate group will always be a representative of a specific subgroup as well. For example, Ursula von der Leyen is not only President of the European Commission, but also German, and Angela Merkel is not only

German, but also from former Eastern Germany. Such identity characteristics affects a person's ability to influence others within the superordinate group (Duck & Fielding, 2003), as potential followers are aware of the subgroup affiliation and concerned whether the leader is really for 'us' (rather than using his position to advance the interests of his/her subgroup).

3.2.3 Promoting the Superordinate Identity

Solidarity is the glue that keeps our Union together (...) When the Portuguese hills were burning, Italian planes doused the flames. When floods cut off the power in Romania, Swedish generators turned the lights back on. When thousands of refugees arrived on Greek shores, Slovakian tents provided shelter. (Jean-Claude Juncker)

Promoting the superordinate identity can be supported by shaping the intergroup norms on the subgroup level (e.g., Hogg et al., 2012). This encompasses reducing negative feelings as well as strengthening positive feelings towards the outgroup ('we like them'), which should facilitate intergroup cooperation and the identification of common ground in terms of interests and goals. The salience of the superordinate identity is heightened through the promotion of positive intergroup feelings, as its fittingness for the collective achievement of interests and goals is underscored (Turner et al., 1987) which, then, will enhance identification with the superordinate group. Further, identity stewards can invoke intergroup comparisons on the superordinate level (e.g., comparing the EU to the USA) to increase the comparative fit (Turner et al., 1987) of the superordinate identity. Such comparisons should lead to perceptions of homogeneity (of attitudes, and beliefs) within the identified group (e.g., EU) and distinctiveness of other groups (e.g., USA; Oakes et al., 1994).

3.2.4 *Using Inclusive Language*

Sometimes I think: When we are so busy expanding and renewing our common European home, then we can easily overlook the great, the unique, in the face of all the construction work. Because after all the wars and endless suffering, something great has come about: We citizens of Europe are united to our happiness. Europe is our common future. It was a dream for generations. (Angela Merkel)

Inclusive language – that is, referencing “we” and “us” (rather than “I” and “me”) – is another important means to develop shared identities (Fladerer, Haslam et al., 2021; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Along these lines, an analysis of 43 Australian federal elections showed that in 80% of elections, the winning Prime Ministerial candidate used more collective pronouns than his or her opponent (e.g., ‘we,’ ‘us;’ Steffens & Haslam, 2013; see also: Fladerer, Haslam et al., 2021). Inclusive political rhetoric (e.g., ‘we Australians’) conveys that identity stewards themselves identify with the group and provides them with the opportunity to shape the understanding of “who we are” (e.g., Reicher et al., 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) – partly to position themselves as a prototypical member (i.e., as a representation of *what the group aspires to be*; Steffens et al., 2021). Being seen as prototypical for the social identity is indeed crucial for leader effectiveness (Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Steffens et al., 2021). However, as identity entrepreneurs, leaders can actively shape the group’s prototype (which is malleable; Reicher et al., 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Moreover, prototypicality is not the only route towards influence. Studies by Steffens and colleagues (2015) suggest that leaders who are seen to be less prototypical may still be able to influence others by demonstrating their strong identification with the group. By demonstrating that one is ‘of the group’ and ‘for the group’ (Steffens et al., 2015), leaders may neutralize attacks aiming at portraying them as defiling and devaluing “us” (Maskor et al., 2021).

3.3 Sustaining the Group Identity

3.3.1 *Championing Collective Goals*

On its own, every European country is too weak to face global challenges. That is why there can only be one answer: Do not act alone, but together in a united Europe. ... It was and is a decision for our European way of life. It combines economic success and social responsibility. (Angela Merkel)

While most of these aspects of the framework focus on communication and rhetoric in the present, they will count for little when the superordinate identity does not approach its goals in the (near) future. Group members draw self-esteem from their group memberships and therefore commit more strongly to high status groups (Ellemers et al., 1997). Therefore, stewards of the superordinate identity need to champion the group's collective interests and goals and make their achievements visible to group members (Haslam et al., 2020). Maskor and colleagues (2021) emphasize that a leader is destabilized as soon as he or she is seen as “thwarting the pursuit of collective goals” (p. 270) and thus devaluating the group.

Championing group goals also incorporates embedding the identity in the social reality of its members (Haslam et al., 2020). Members need to be able to see and feel the achievements of the superordinate group. This is particularly relevant for superordinate identities, because they are typically more abstract and more distal for group members as subgroup identities (e.g., national identities; Cinnirella, 1997). In other words, the superordinate identity has to become a (positively loaded) part of peoples' everyday lives. Advancing the collective interests will also lead to more leeway to shape the group's values and norms in the future (Steffens et al., 2013).

3.3.2 *Actualizing the Identity Content*

Only together can we preserve our European ideal of society in the future. Only together can we enforce economic and social standards on an international level. Because we should not be mistaken: the world is not waiting for Europe. Other regions of the world are developing at an almost breathtaking speed. That is why Europe needs one thing above all: it needs dynamism. Because without dynamism there is no prosperity and without dynamism there is less and less solidarity in Europe. (Angela Merkel)

Lastly, narratives are in a continuous contest; developing a narrative is never a one-shot activity. Thus, identity construction is a continuous process that runs through cycles of reflecting, representing, and realizing (Haslam et al., 2017, 2020). This is underscored by examples of schisms in groups (Sani, 2008). Identity stewards need to be sensitive to internal and external forces that (deliberately or unintentionally) undermine or subvert the group's shared identity (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019). Internal forces may seek to lead the group into a different direction from the identity stewards' version of identity and also their representativeness of the group (Maskor et al., 2021; Portice & Reicher, 2018). External forces, such as outgroups, may seek to subvert the group by undermining its cohesiveness or status. However, outgroup threat is also a powerful force to bring a group together (Greenaway & Cruwys, 2019).

3.4 The Relevance of Voice within the Group

The Belgian newspaper "La Libre Belgique" wrote about the negotiations on the Treaty of Rome - I quote: "The Germans are all important doctors and well organized. The French are well-bred, love plans and theories. The Italians wear wonderful ties and stockings, and they even have fireworks statistics exploding." Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we are all of this and much more. This is Europe. Scepticism, contradictions, diversity, also some beloved clichés, but not least courage - all of that is Europe. (Angela Merkel)

Taken together, developing narratives that resonate with (potential) followers (i.e., mobilizes followers to action) is a dynamic, ongoing process (Haslam et al., 2020, 2021). A number of factors is likely to affect these processes (e.g., competing narratives, group configurations, external threats) and its outcomes (e.g., identification, voting behavior). Of these, *voice within the group* has been flagged as particularly important in the literature (e.g., Sani, 2008). Voice within the group refers to allowing group members to express dissenting opinions without the fear of repression or exclusion (e.g., Eggins et al., 2002). Even though leaders (or identity stewards) have some influence on a group's understanding of the collective identity (and, hence, behavior), followers' agency must not be underestimated (e.g., Haslam et al., 2020). For example, group members may decide to leave the group (e.g., found their own party) if they see that the group no longer represents what it used to (Sani, 2005, 2008).

There is likely a complex relationship between *voice opportunities* and group functioning: with too few (dogma) and too many (cacophony) voices both undermining leaders' efforts of developing a *core* narrative (i.e., a set of values and beliefs that are shared by most members; see "master frame"; Benford & Snow, 2000). Finding the balance may be facilitated by a group's self-definition in terms of its values and norms (Hornsey et al., 2006).

In this respect, in contrast to autocratic governments, democratic systems – like the EU – see the plurality of opinions as defining element of “who we are.” For such a system, a certain degree of dissent is perceived by group members as fruitful and an expression of a lively group (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014). However, identity stewards need to emphasize and protect the common ground the shared identity builds on (and thus define the confines of dissent; Sani, 2008). Dissenting behavior that strongly subverts the group identity (e.g., a severe deviation from the group norms) not only leads to hostile attitudes towards the dissenter but also to intentions to leave the group when the dissenter is not contested (Ditrich & Sassenberg, 2016). These findings would suggest that within a social group that defines itself as ‘diverse’ and ‘democratic’ (see Treaty on European Union of 1992), identity stewards need to contest nationalist outbursts. In the face of such outbursts, it will be particularly important for pro-EU leaders to ‘stand up’ for the superordinate group and to actively promote it.

4. Discussion

The world faces many challenges, and many of them (e.g., the climate crisis, COVID-19) require coordinated multilateral efforts (Batalha & Reynolds, 2012; Haslam et al., 2021). To facilitate transnational cooperation and policy coordination, the world’s nations have established transnational organizations like the UN, WHO or EU. What makes the EU unique is its depth of integration, as it is based not only on intergovernmental features, but also on supranational ones like policy domains that were devolved upwards to the European Commission (Kuhn & Nicoli, 2020). Hence, it is not surprising that the EU (unlike other intergovernmental international organizations) has become the realm of intense identity contestation.

In this contestation, the EU is facing growing EU-skepticism among the public at large, and the rise of parties that claim to ‘give voice’ to growing popular dissatisfaction with the EU. Pro-EU leaders have meanwhile gone to great lengths to underscore the importance

of transnational unity and solidarity, and to explain that Europe is currently facing many challenges that require cross-borders cooperation within the EU. Such pro-EU narratives may be reported in the news media, but they appear to receive much less airtime than the often alarmist negative EU narratives advanced by PRRP leaders. Hence, it seems that EU sceptics have gained an upper-hand in the advancement of identity narratives, and there are fears the EU may disintegrate further (Portice & Reicher, 2018).

However, as researchers have shown, it would be naive to view negative EU attitudes as merely reflecting a rise in spontaneous dissatisfaction with the EU's performance and/or direction, as this would overlook that (EU) leaders play an active role in shaping followers' (EU-)attitudes (Hofmann & Mérand, 2020; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Mols & Jetten, 2020). So far, research has focused on EU-sceptic actors and their negative EU narratives, rather than on pro-EU parties and leaders advancing positive EU narratives. A further problem is that EU attitude research is often overly descriptive, and lacking a theoretically informed framework. The aim of this paper has been to address both shortcomings.

Our identity-based framework of leader narratives comprises the following elements: 1) crafting a (superordinate) group identity (i.e., understanding and reflecting it); 2) managing the group identity, which includes creating collective continuity, using inclusive language, and promoting the superordinate identity while respecting subgroups; and 3) sustaining the group identity by championing collective goals and actualizing the identity content. As we saw, EU-skeptic and pro-EU leaders use very different narratives to weaken or strengthen support for European integration, and it may therefore be tempting to conclude that these narratives have little or nothing in common. However, by unpacking EU identity leader discourses in a systematic way, and by analyzing the way in which shared social identity is being invoked and harnessed, we show that the *underlying dynamic* for constructing positive and negative EU identity narratives is in fact remarkably similar in both cases. In other words, while EU-sceptic and pro-EU leaders harness and advance completely different categories

(either ‘the nation’ or ‘the EU’), and promote diametrically opposing (national vs. transnational) policy solutions, they use a remarkably similar discursive/rhetorical strategy to frame issues and mobilize (would-be) followers (Maskor et al., 2021). In our view, it is important to keep this similarity in mind, since it helps us to see more clearly that senior politicians all mobilize identity, but in different ways depending on their political project. Therefore, rather than to view pro-EU leaders as appealing to reason and EU-sceptic leaders as appealing to emotions, it becomes clear that leaders on both sides of the divide appeal to emotions and a shared sense of belonging.

This insight is essential if we are to gain a deeper understanding of why EU-sceptic (rather than pro-EU leaders) have gained the upper hand in political discourse in recent decades. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a definitive answer to this question. However, it is clear from existing research that populist EU-sceptic leaders have often benefited from being in (permanent) opposition, and from being able to interpret issues more creatively than leaders of governing parties (Mudde, 2007). Another possible explanation is that pro-EU leaders have failed to form a united front in the defense of the EU, resulting in a leadership vacuum that EU-sceptic leaders were able to fill. Finally, it is also plausible that pro-EU leaders struggled to ‘make the case for Europe’ because the EU ran into problems it was ill-equipped to address (e.g., the Euro-crisis, the Syrian refugee crisis, corporate tax evasion). However, leaders play an important role in shaping perceptions about such challenges, including perceptions about whether or not these challenges are surmountable (Börzel & Risse, 2020; Haslam et al., 2021; Mols & Jetten, 2020). Changing EU attitudes can never be attributed exclusively to ‘societal developments’, and this is why it remains important to develop a more refined understanding of the strategies (pro-EU and EU-sceptic) leaders use to influence EU attitudes, a process that typically involves invoking and harnessing social identities in a systematic and strategic way.

5. References

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